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A LESSON IN ART.

I HAVE gone three or four times to see the Watts collection at the Metropolitan Museum, and each time have rebelled at the obviousness of its faults; for the faults are manifold and readily to be seen by an eye in any way trained to see form or feel the quality of things. The drawing is defective, the color is dry, muddy, and of an unpleasant mealiness, and in all the examples, with the notable exception of the portrait of Burne Jones, and several other of the portraits in a lesser degree—there is a most singular hardness which asserts itself alike through hair, flesh and draperies—all having the effect of being harshly cut out of wood. The large horses in the "Mid-Day Rest" are stuffed horses. Indeed, almost every one of the pictures has certain infelicities of expression that make it hard for one to get along into what the man meant by it all, and that almost compel one to think at first that, however much he may have meant, he certainly never arrived at anything. I am sure that after the first visit I was almost fortified in the conclusion that Mr. Watts was an intellectual man of rather a high order, who had mistaken his means of expression—an imaginative writer of prose, trying to paint, in fact; and in some sense I still incline to think that that is true. So strong is the human inclination to stop in intermediates, to regard the means rather than the end, that had this collection been shown by itself, I would scarcely have been able to prevail upon myself to look at it more than once; but as I had moved along, upon the occasion of my first visit into the north room, and fixed my attention upon the somewhat confusing portrait of "Katie," a young lady remarked, "Well, this helps Watts out," and, turning to a trifling but superficially clever picture by a popular painter near by, I was immediately, by contrast, impressed with a sense of deference for the before-seemingly somewhat absurd portrait of "Katie." Turning then, and looking into the west room at the portrait of Mr. John Taylor Johnston, by Bonnet, I was at once impressed by the superficial but vulgar perfectness of that work, and the real gravity and interior repleteness of the group of Watts' portraits hanging nearest me, which, by force of this contrast, were made manifest. Each successive visit served merely, through like, but more accentuated processes of feeling, to impress me, in the end, with the fact that Mr. Watts is a man who has something to say for himself of a large kind, which he does manage to say in spite of his halting method; and that almost all the other people whose works are hanging about, having nothing of any particular weight to utter, manage to unburden themselves with an easy flippancy, which, by contrast, is quite depressing.

In all this is a lesson for us all—a lesson we need continually to have impressed upon us in every way possible—for we are continually elevating manner over matter, regarding the way of saying a thing rather than the thing said, stopping, as I have said, in the means, and forgetting what we set out to do. The art for art heresy, rather than art for truth, has certainly never had more disciples than now. The prevailing tone of almost any exhibit of pictures

is of utter self-consciousness, of shallow show of technique, which, leading nowhere or to nothing, is vapid, enervating and infectious.

Faults of expression are faults all the same, when ever so great a thing is expressed in spite of them, and should be overcome at any expense of labor, because they are offensive, and as stumbling blocks in the way of those who sincerely want to see things as they are seen by the artist; but we must remember that great things, profound things; the interior truths which it is the highest function of art to make manifest, cannot be told in current language made for the conveyance of current thought. Platitudinous commonplace with enough show of cleverness to make it popular is easy enough to get at, and to do in any art, in any mode of expression; but to fit words, or form and color to the expression of these interior truths; to bring out of secret places images of secret things for the life of the world, is to fit a language to a new thing; is to convey with worn methods to the world what the eye of no man has seen before. So, as in the case of Mr. Watts, having once got where he is, through his work, and seeing things in some way, as he sees them from his place, we ought to be thankful enough, and forget that it was with a trembling hand and uncertain step he led us there.

—W. R. O'DONOVAN.

SEVERAL BIRDS WITH ONE STONE.

AMONG all the persons who have talked or written about the forthcoming exhibition of the American Art Association, and the difficulty in the way of making awards that will give satisfaction to all parties concerned, it is singular that no one has suggested the following plan, which I am sure will give perfect content to a larger number of people than can be given in any other way.

It is well known that as artists object to lay judgments on their works, a jury chosen from the donors of the fund would not be an acceptable one.

The aforesaid donors naturally wish to have a hand in the distribution of their own money, and, besides, entertain the opinion that an artist is not only the poorest judge of his own work, but also the poorest judge of the works of other artists. Now, as each of the parties most interested have but little respect for the judgment of the other, a third party or umpire is needed, whom we will find in the person of the art critic. The art critics are endorsed by our great newspapers and magazines as thoroughly competent judges of art, as otherwise they would not employ them and accord them the whole influence of the publications.

Let these art critics constitute the committee on awards; shut them all up in a room, double lock the doors, bar the windows, and allow the survivor to deliver his own unanimous opinion. In this manner quite a number of birds may be killed with one stone, and we will all be happy.

—INDIAN RED.

It is claimed that Mr. G. I. Seney's collection cost \$800,000. As the pictures were purchased before the duty was imposed, they did not cost him this sum, and are now worth 30 per cent. more than what he paid.